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Fear and Doubt

Written: May 15, 1967
Source: Pamphlet titled *Essays From the Minister of Defense* published by the Black Panther Party, 1968, Oakland
Transcription/Markup: 2021 by Philip Mooney
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The lower socio-economic Black male is a man of confusion. He faces a hostile environment and is not sure that is is not his own sins that have attracted the hostilities of society. All his life he has been taught (explicitly and implicitly) that he is an inferior approximation of humanity. As a man, he find himself void of those things that bring respect and a feeling of worthiness. He looks around for something to blame for his situation, but because he is not sophisticated regarding socio-economic milieu and because of negativistic parental and institutional teachings, he ultimately blames himself.

When he was a child, his parents told him that they were not affluent because “we didn’t have the opportunity to become educated,” or “we did not take advantage of the educational opportunities that were offered to us.” They tell their children that things will be different for them if they are educated and skilled, but that there is absolutely nothing other than this occasional warning (and often not even this) to stimulate education. Black people are great worshipers of education, even the lower socio-economic Black person, but at the same time, they are afraid of exposing themselves to it. They are afraid because they are vulnerable to having their fears verified; perhaps they will find that they can’t compete with White students. The Black person tells himself that he could have done much more if he had really wanted to. The fact is, of course, that the assumed educational opportunities were never available to the lower socio-economic Black person due to the unique position assigned him in life.

It is a two-headed monster that haunts this man. First, his attitude is that he lacks innate ability to cope with the socio-economic problems confronting him, and second, he tells himself

that he has the ability, but he simply has not felt strongly enough to try to acquire the skills needed to manipulate his environment. In a desperate effort to assume self-respect he rationalizes that he is lethargic, in this way, he denies a possible lack of innate ability. If he openly attempts to discover his abilities, he and others may see him for what he is — or is not — and this is the real fear. He then withdraws into the world of the invisible, but not without a struggle. He may attempt to make himself visible by processing his hair, acquiring a "boss mop", or driving a long car, even though he can't afford it. He may father several illegitimate children by several different women in order to display his masculinity. But in the end, he realizes that he is ineffectual in his efforts.

Society responds to him as a thing, a beast, a non-entity, something to be ignored or stepped on. He is asked to respect laws that do not respect him. He is asked to digest a code of ethics that acts upon him but not for him. He is confused and in a constant state of rage, of shame and doubt. This psychological set permeates all his interpersonal relationships. It determines his view of the social system. His psychological development has been prematurely arrested. This doubt begins at a very early age and continues through his life. The parents pass it on to the child and the social system reinforces the fear, the shame, and the doubt. In the third or fourth grade, he may find that he shares the classroom with White students, but when the class is engaged in reading exercises, all the Black students find themselves in a group at a table reserved for slow readers. This may be quite an innocent effort on the part of the school system. The teacher may not realize that the Black students feared (in fact, feel certain) that Black means dumb and White means smart. The children do not realize that the head start the children got at home is what accounts for the situation. It is generally accepted that the child is the father of the man; this holds true for the lower socio-economic Black people.

With whom, with what can he, a man, identify? As a child he has no permanent male figure with whom to identify; as a man, he sees nothing in society with which he can identify as an extension of himself. His life is built on mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation and despair. He feels that he is something less than a man, and it is evident in his conversation: "the White man is 'THE MAN,' he got everything, and he knows everything, and a nigger ain't nothing." In a society

where a man is valued according to occupation and material possessions, he is without possessions. He is unskilled and more often than not, either marginally employed or unemployed. Often his wife (who is able to secure a job as a maid cleaning for White people) is the breadwinner. He is, therefore, viewed as quite worthless by his wife and children. He is ineffectual both in and out of the home. He cannot provide for or protect his family. He is invisible, a non-entity. Society will not acknowledge him as a man. He is a consumer and not a producer. He is dependent upon the White man ('THE MAN') to feed his family, to give him a job, educate his children, serve as the model that he tries to emulate. He is dependent and he hates 'THE MAN' and he hates himself. Who is he? Is he a very old adolescent or is he the slave he used to be?

What did he do to be so BLACK and blue?